

IN THE CLAIMS:

A complete listing of the claims is set forth below. Please amend the claims as follows:

1-28. **(Canceled)**

29. **(New)** An electronic commerce system for facilitating an electronic commerce transaction, the electronic commerce system comprising:

a distributed plurality of seller databases, wherein each seller database is associated with a corresponding seller and different from other seller databases in the distributed plurality of seller databases, including product data for one or more products;

a global content directory coupled with the distributed plurality of seller databases, the global content directory server providing a plurality of buyers access to the distributed plurality of seller databases, the global content directory server comprising:

a directory structure comprising a plurality of hierarchically organized product classes, each product class categorizing a plurality of products and defining one or more attributes of the products categorized in the product class;

one or more pointers for each product class, each pointer identifying the seller database in the distributed plurality of seller databases in which product data enabling a product transaction is stored for products categorized in the product class; and

a search interface operable to communicate, in response to a selection of a product class by one of the plurality of buyers, a search query for product data to the distributed plurality of seller databases identified by one or more pointers associated with the selected product class; and

in response to communicating the search query for product data to the distributed plurality of seller databases identified by one or more pointers associated with the selected product class, receive address information associated with a seller database associated with a seller of the selected product, the seller database including product data for the selected product, wherein one of the plurality of buyers is operable to communicate with the seller associated with the seller database to conduct a commerce transaction relating to the selected product using the received address information.

30. **(New)** The electronic commerce system of Claim 29, wherein the directory structure comprises a lightweight directory access protocol (LDAP) directory.

31. **(New)** The electronic commerce system of Claim 29, wherein the directory structure is distributed between a plurality of computers.

32. **(New)** The electronic commerce system of Claim 29, wherein the global content directory server is coupled to the distributed plurality of seller databases using the Internet.

33. **(New)** The electronic commerce system of Claim 29, further comprising one or more additional directory structures, each directory structure comprising the same classes but organized using different hierarchies.

34. **(New)** The electronic commerce system of Claim 29, wherein the search query comprises a structured query language (SQL) query.

35. **(New)** The electronic commerce system of Claim 29, wherein the search query includes one or more attributes of the class selected by one of the plurality of buyers.

36. **(New)** The electronic commerce system of Claim 29, wherein the search query includes values for one or more desired product features specified by one of the plurality of buyers.

37. **(New)** The electronic commerce system of Claim 29, wherein the search interface is further operable to receive search results from the one or more seller databases each associated with its corresponding seller and distinct from the other seller databases in the plurality of seller databases in response to the search query, the search results including product data associated with one or more products satisfying the search query, the directory operable to communicate the search results to one of the plurality of buyers.

38. **(New)** The electronic commerce system of Claim 37, wherein the electronic commerce system is operable to:

receive a selection from one of the plurality of buyers of a product for which product data is included in the search results; and

communicate address information associated with a seller database associated with a seller of the selected product, the seller database including product data for the selected product, the address information enabling one of the plurality of buyers to communicate with the seller associated with the seller database to conduct a commerce transaction relating to the selected product.

39. **(New)** A method for facilitating an electronic commerce transaction, the method comprising:

providing a plurality of buyers access to a global content directory for a distributed plurality of seller databases, each seller database associated with a corresponding seller and different from other seller databases in the distributed plurality of seller databases;

providing a directory structure comprising a plurality of hierarchically organized product classes, each product class categorizing a plurality of products and defining one or more attributes of the products categorized in the product class;

providing one or more pointers for each product class, each pointer identifying the seller database in the distributed plurality of seller databases in which product data enabling a product transaction is stored for products categorized in the product class;

providing a search interface operable to communicate, in response to a selection of a product class by one of the plurality of buyers, a search query for product data to the distributed plurality of seller databases identified by one or more pointers associated with the selected product class; and

in response to communicating the search query for product data to the distributed plurality of seller databases identified by one or more pointers associated with the selected product class, receiving address information associated with a seller database associated with a seller of the selected product, the seller database including product data for the selected product, wherein one of the plurality of buyers is operable to communicate with the seller associated with the seller database to conduct a commerce transaction relating to the selected product using the received address information.

40. **(New)** The method of Claim 39, wherein the directory structure comprises a lightweight directory access protocol (LDAP) directory.

41. **(New)** The method of Claim 39, wherein the directory structure is distributed between a plurality of computers.

42. **(New)** The method of Claim 39, wherein the search interface communicates with the distributed plurality of seller databases using the Internet.

43. **(New)** The method of Claim 39, wherein the search query comprises a structured query language (SQL) query.

44. **(New)** The method of Claim 39, wherein the search query includes one or more attributes of the class selected by one of the plurality of buyers.

45. **(New)** The method of Claim 39, wherein the search query includes values for one or more desired product features specified from one of the plurality of buyers.

46. **(New)** The method of Claim 39, further comprising:
receiving search results from the one or more seller databases each associated with its corresponding seller and distinct from the other seller in the plurality of seller databases in response to the search query, the search results including product data associated with one or more products satisfying the search query; and
communicating the search results to one of the plurality of buyers.

47. **(New)** The method of Claim 46, further comprising:
receiving a selection from one of the plurality of buyers of a product for which product data is included in the search results; and
communicating address information associated with a seller database associated with a seller of the selected product, the seller database including product data for the selected product, the address information enabling one of the plurality of buyers to communicate with the seller associated with the seller database to conduct a commerce transaction relating to the selected product.

48. **(New)** Software for facilitating an electronic commerce transaction, the software embodied in a computer-readable medium and when executed operable to:

provide a plurality of buyers access to a global content directory for a distributed plurality of seller databases, each seller database associated with a corresponding seller and different from other seller databases in the distributed plurality of seller databases;

provide a directory structure comprising a plurality of hierarchically organized product classes, each product class categorizing a plurality of products and defining one or more attributes of the products categorized in the product class;

provide one or more pointers for each product class, each pointer identifying the seller database in the distributed plurality of seller databases in which product data enabling a product transaction is stored for products categorized in the product class;

provide a search interface operable to communicate, in response to a selection of a product class by one of the plurality of buyers, a search query for product data to the distributed plurality of seller databases identified by one or more pointers associated with the selected product class; and

in response to communicating the search query for product data to the distributed plurality of seller databases identified by one or more pointers associated with the selected product class, receive address information associated with a seller database associated with a seller of the selected product, the seller database including product data for the selected product, wherein one of the plurality of buyers is operable to communicate with the seller associated with the seller database to conduct a commerce transaction relating to the selected product using the received address information.

49. **(New)** The software of Claim 48, wherein the directory structure comprises a lightweight directory access protocol (LDAP) directory.

50. **(New)** The software of Claim 48, wherein the directory structure is distributed between a plurality of computers.

51. **(New)** The software of Claim 48, wherein the software communicates with the distributed plurality of seller databases using the Internet.

52. **(New)** The software of Claim 48, wherein the search query comprises a structured query language (SQL) query.

53. **(New)** The software of Claim 48, wherein the search query includes one or more attributes of the class selected by one of the plurality of buyers.

54. **(New)** The software of Claim 48, wherein the search query includes values for one or more desired product features specified by one of the plurality of buyers.

55. **(New)** The software of Claim 48, further operable to:
receive search results from the one or more seller databases each associated with its corresponding seller and distinct from the other seller databases in the plurality of seller databases in response to the search query, the search results including product data associated with one or more products satisfying the search query; and
communicate the search results to one of the plurality of buyers.

56. **(New)** The software of Claim 55, further operable to:
receive a selection from one of the plurality of buyers of a product for which product data is included in the search results; and
communicate, to the one or more buyers, address information associated with a seller database associated with a seller of the selected product, the seller database including product data for the selected product, the address information enabling one of the plurality of buyers to communicate with the seller associated with the seller database to conduct a commerce transaction relating to the selected product.